

Cutting physician reimbursement will not make our nation stronger, healthier or safer. I believe that less physician time will mean less health and more healthcare cost.

Please take action to prevent further deterioration of the medical care for the elderly.

I couldn't agree more.

I have heard from so many people regarding this issue. I will read one more statement, from Dr. Thomas Watkins, a DO and family practice physician in Muskegon, MI:

It will be a travesty for many seniors if doctors stop accepting Medicare due to fund cutting. With our expenses going up 5–10 percent annually and Medicare cutting 5 percent next year it will be very difficult for many of my colleagues and myself to continue to practice medicine for Medicare recipients. Please at least vote to freeze the fee schedule to allow access for all seniors to the physician of their choice, just as you have that privilege.

I simply ask that we act now. We have no more time to wait. People are counting on us.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HONORING SENATORIAL SERVICE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, we are coming to the end of the session and 10 of our colleagues are retiring. I want to say a word about them, especially one of them, my colleague, Senator BILL FRIST, from Tennessee.

BILL FRIST

I can still remember when BILL FRIST came to my office in Nashville in 1994 and said he wanted to run for the Senate. I didn't know what to think. BILL FRIST lived in the neighborhood where I lived in Nashville, but I didn't know him very well. Our ages are a little bit different and he had been away while I was Governor of Tennessee, practicing medicine and honing his skills.

What I did know about him was that he was extraordinary. He was one of the pioneers in our country of heart and lung transplants. He performed the first one in Tennessee, the first one in the Southeast. When he decided to run for the Senate, only a handful of physicians in the world had made as many heart transplants as Dr. BILL FRIST.

He had almost no chance of being elected to the Senate in 1994. However, he was elected. He had almost no chance, after having been elected, to help the Republicans gain the majority in 2002, but he did that. No one expected him to be the majority leader of the Senate, but he has been and he has done it very well.

As we look at the record of the accomplishments over the last 4 years, Senator FRIST can take credit for his leadership in creating an environment where we have had tax cuts that have benefited Americans, where we have confirmed judges who will interpret the

law rather than make it up as they go along. His hand was in the Medicare prescription drug benefit which benefits millions of seniors. We would not have had the \$15 billion for HIV/AIDS in Africa had it not been for BILL FRIST.

In Tennessee, we have had a sales tax deduction against our Federal income tax and a new governing board for the Tennessee Valley Authority, neither of which would have been accomplished were it not for BILL FRIST. When Lyndon Johnson was majority leader, he often said, having Lyndon Johnson as majority leader is good for the country and hasn't hurt Texas one bit. I would say, having BILL FRIST as majority leader has been good for the country and it hasn't hurt Tennessee one bit.

He has been the perfect colleague. His ego has been completely under control in a body where that is rare and difficult. And one thing is certain: Anyone who knows BILL FRIST won't underestimate him again. History has proven that is a dangerous thing to do. I don't know very many people who have ever been in public life who have as many interesting and important and viable options open to him as he does as he looks forward to the next step in his contributions to public service.

One of the joys of being a Senator is simply the privilege of serving with other Senators. Each one of the Senators has something remarkable and special. For example, Senator FRIST was president of the skydiving club at Princeton when he was there. He spends vacations in Sudan, doing surgery on poor people. He once got up at 4 in the morning and went to the National Zoo to operate on the heart of a gorilla—which I guess is a pretty good way of preparing for coming to the Senate floor and dealing with what he has to deal with here. He is not the only one who is a very special Senator.

CONRAD BURNS

My friend, CONRAD BURNS, who is retiring, was a marine, an auctioneer, had his own radio program and TV program in Montana. He would sometimes pick up hitchhikers on his way in to work in the Senate—a pretty good surprise for a Government employee to be picked up by a U.S. Senator.

MIKE DEWINE

Or MIKE DEWINE, with his eight children and ninth grandchild, whose heart is nearly as big as he is. He lost a child, and he and Fran have gone to Haiti time after time after time to help people there who need help.

GEORGE ALLEN

Or GEORGE ALLEN. I remember vividly the first time I met him, I campaigned for him in Virginia. He was 40 points behind. I went back to Tennessee and I said, I believe he will win, he is such a good candidate. We haven't heard the last of him in public life.

RICK SANTORUM

Or RICK SANTORUM, Karen, and their six children whom they home school, and his Italian heritage—which ex-

plains a lot about his enthusiasm and vigor for the things he believes in most strongly.

PAUL SARBANES

Or PAUL SARBANES, who was in the same Rhodes Scholar class with Senator DICK LUGAR.

JIM TALENT

Or JIM TALENT, who was the outstanding political science student at Washington University in St. Louis when he was there. No one would be surprised to learn that.

LINCOLN CHAFEE

Or Senator LINC CHAFEE, also retiring, was a wrestler in college. He spent several years in the United States and Canada as a professional blacksmith before he got into politics.

MARK DAYTON

Or MARK DAYTON, whose interest in the environment in Minnesota has been so exceptional.

JIM JEFFORDS

Or JIM JEFFORDS, a former Navy captain, who has had so much to do with offering legislation for clean air and children with disabilities.

When the most recent class of Senators was sworn into office nearly 2 years ago, in the gallery were three women. One was the grandmother of BARACK OBAMA. She was from Kenya. One was the mother of Senator SALAZAR, a 10th generation American. One was the mother of MEL MARTINEZ, the new Republican National Committee chairman, who, with her husband, put her son on an airplane when he was 14 years old and sent him from Cuba to the United States, not knowing if she would ever see him again.

In a way, each one of us who is here is an accident. None of us knew we would be here. Each of us is privileged to serve, and one of the greatest privileges is to serve with our colleagues. We will miss them and we are grateful for their service.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia is recognized.

REFLECTIONS ON SENATE SERVICE

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. President, as the time for my departure from the Senate draws near, on behalf of the greatest blessing in my life, my wife Susan, and on behalf of myself, I thank all of my colleagues for their many courtesies and friendships that have been forged during the past 6 years and offer a few concluding reflections about our time here together, as well as talk about the future of our Republic.

Our foremost statesman in Virginia, Harry Byrd, Jr., observed that with the exception of the Presidencies of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, no time in the history of our country has witnessed more problems and challenges of great magnitude than these past 6 years.

When I arrived here in January of 2001, America was at peace, or so it